Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
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FIELD OUTING
Sunday, 15 November 2009, 6AM: Edulabad / Inkriyal
Route: Ghatkesar village crossroads - right turn, drive about 4km towards Edulabad - Inkriyal (2km after Edulabad). The water bodies in these places should be full after the recent rains. One can look forward to seeing a number of water birds like the Jacanas and Teals, and also other birds like cuckoos. There might be some migrants too. This will be a half-day trip. Carry plenty of snacks and water. For further information and to coordinate, please call Mr MS Kulkarni (98490-82109) or Mr Siraj Taher (98482-72520).

Trip Report – Palmakola, 18th October 2009

Abhinava Kidambi (Age 11 years)

This month's birding trip was very special for me as it coincided with my birthday - 18th October. To add to the excitement, I was using my new binoculars for the first time (a birthday gift from my parents)!

Palmakola is a beautiful place but the water body there was slightly polluted as it was very close to the village. There were only 6 people on this trip. I was not expecting to see many birds so soon after Diwali, but was surprised to find quite a few.

As we walked towards the lake, Little (*Egretta garzetta*) and Intermediate Egrets (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) and Red-Rumped Swallows (*Hirundo daurica*) were flying all around. I saw Paddyfield Pipits (*Anthus rufulus*) hopping about nearby. There were also a number of Red-Wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) with their all-too-familiar call of 'Did-you-do-it'. Out in the distance, on a rock, stood a Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*).

I was thrilled to see Greater Painted-snipes (*Rostratula benghalensis*) and Common Coots (*Fulica atra*) for the very first time. We later spotted a few Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*) flying about. As we were chatting, a Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*) suddenly appeared out of nowhere. At the same time, we also saw a Spot-Billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) in the water. There were also a few White-Breasted Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) around the lake.

As we proceeded further, I observed tiny frogs as small as the size of my thumb. I caught one in my cap. Some of us climbed a small bund while the others were still chatting. We had to cross a very slushy stretch and all our shoes got very dirty. From above, we saw an Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) and a Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*).

Another exciting sighting was the Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*). Boy, what a sight that was! A few minutes later, three Black Ibises (*Pseudibis papillosa*) flew across and landed on the rocks near by. As we came sliding down the bund, a few of us saw a Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) flying across.

As we headed back, we saw a River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*) and some Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*). We also saw a Large Grey Babbler (*Turdoides malcolmi*) and Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) flying overhead. On reaching our cars, we saw an Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*) and a Black-Shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) on a wire. That was the last bird of the day.

On our way back we stopped at a *dhaba* and had hot *puris* and very sweet *chai*. For me it was a very memorable 11th birthday, thanks to BSAP.

Romance of Birdwatching

S. Ashok Kumar

What is this life if, full of care
We have no time to stand and stare?
No time to stand beneath the boughs,
And stare as long as sheep or cows,
No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night…

So lamented William Henry Davies. Slave to an artificial life in the concrete jungles of towns and cities, man is so engrossed in the materialistic world that he has become insensitive and indifferent to his surroundings. He no longer takes pleasure in nature. For such people, it is time to break away from drudgery and find the fuller meaning of life in Nature's embrace.

Who will not be moved, thrilled and excited at the site of glittering snow-clad mountains, cascading waterfalls, murmuring brooks, placid lakes, meandering rivers, roaring waves, shimmering beaches, colorful rainbows, beckoning stars, thundering clouds, flushing meadows, fragrant flowers and bewitching birds.

Birds, the winged jewels of the sky, are the most enchanting part of our life, yet we seldom notice them. They figure in our legends and fables like the Panchatantra and Hitopadesa, in our great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, in our sculptures and paintings like Halebid, Khajuraho, Konarak and Ajanta frescoes, Moghul and Rajasthani schools of art, and in the literary of Kalidas. They appear in our mythology as mounts or vehicles of several deities. Some have become objects of superstition (Crow, Owl, Lapwing) while some others are considered symbols of peace and wisdom (Dove, Owl) and harbinger of rain (Pied Crested Cuckoo).

Bird watching is a highly fascinating, absorbing and rewarding hobby. To get the best out of it, a few things are essential:

Field guide: The Book of Indian Birds by Dr. Salim Ali will serve as a good field guide.

Binoculars: A prism model with central focusing, wide field and, at least six-power magnification (6 x 30) is an ideal one. It will bring the bird six times closer and makes distinguishing field marks six times clearer.

Field notebook: A pocket notebook with a pencil.

For a beginner, the garden or a backyard is a good place to start with. Regular field trips will help in the identification of more birds. It is necessary to record the findings in the field notebook and later verify with the field guide. Pencil sketches of the birds seen will be very helpful in identification.

The three necessary attributes of a good birdwatcher are patience, perseverance and a spirit of enquiry. For a rudimentary field course in identification, it is essential to join a Birdwatchers' club that conducts frequent field trips. Colour, plumage, size, shape, silhouette, flight, calls and songs and special mannerisms can identify birds.

Colour and plumage: Bright colored plumage helps in easy identification of birds such as common kingfishers, golden-backed woodpeckers, golden orioles, blue jays, Indian pitta, painted storks, flamingos, etc. Alternate coloured plumage of birds like the pied kingfisher; hoopoe, pied wagtails, etc are easily identifiable.

Size: Generally size is classified as small, medium and large but these are all relative terms. Hence a few widely known birds like sparrow, quail, bulbul, myna, pigeon, partridge, crow, etc are selected as standards, for relative comparison. Plus or minus signs are used to indicate whether the particular bird is smaller or larger than the standard bird.

Shape: The general profile of the bird, its posture, bill, wings, legs, tail and head enable us to identify the birds. Egrets, pond herons, adjutant storks, pelicans, ibises, flamingos, pheasant-tailed jacanas, paradise- flycatchers, swallows, etc are typical instances.

Silhouette: Silhouette impressions are an important tool in bird identification. The silhouettes of eagles, vultures, kites are easily identifiable by the different shapes of their tails.

Flight: Distinctive flight patterns of birds help in identification. The flight of flamingos, cranes and herons are easily distinguishable. A mallard duck takes off vertically from the water while the coot taxies along the water surface like a seaplane before it is airborne. Cranes fly with their neck extended while the heron tucks it into its shoulders. The flash of white during the flight of little stints is unmistakable. Bar-headed Geese fly in V-formation.

Calls and sounds: Nature poets like Wordsworth, Percy B. Shelly, John Keats and Bryon have eulogized the birds for their melodious songs. Bird calls and songs constitute an important mode of identification.

Special features: Some birds are known for their characteristic actions or mannerisms. The Pintail forages with its tail erect, half of its body submerged in water. The wood sandpiper wags its hind portion awkwardly while the wagtail wags its tail. The cormorant spreads its wings wide to dry and the Indian moorhen flicks its tail often.

With more and more field trips to different habitats, one can learn a lot about habitats of birds, their territories, food and breeding habits, calls, etc. One could gradually extend his interest to other fields of study such as bird aerodynamics, migration, camouflage, courting, social behavior and their role in ecological balance. An avid birdwatcher is a potential nature conservationist.

There are more than 23,000 species of birds in the world of which 1,250 species are seen in our country. Andhra Pradesh is a veritable paradise for birdwatchers for it has a variety of habitats and bird species. It is of great concern that habitats in our state and the country are fast disappearing and wildlife is being mercilessly hunted. The onslaught of civilization has resulted in the total disappearance of many species from our planet and many are on the brink of extinction. It is imperative that the conscience of man should be roused to this threat and a vigorous crusade launched for the protection and preservation of natural heritage for posterity.

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, Chandrapur Dist. Maharastra, 2nd - 4th October 2009

Vijay Sirdesai & Humayun Taher

With a long weekend ahead, Humayun and I planned a trip to Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). It is about 20 km from Chandrapur Town in Maharashtra and about 415 km north of Hyderabad.

With the required reservations in place - accommodation, safari jeep and the best of the guides - Humayun and I set off on the morning of 2nd Oct 2009 at 06:00 hours. After about 7 hours of serene drive via good roads and beautiful landscapes, we reached Chandrapur at around 14:10. We had to skip lunch so we could reach Tadoba in time for the evening safari at 15:00. We reached the Moharli gate just 10 min. before the safari was to start. We jumped into the jeep with our gear and headed out to the forest.

Though I had decided to concentrate on and photograph only mammals, the birds caught my attention first. A flock of Red Spurfowl (*Galloperdix spadicea*) welcomed us as we entered the reserve. We headed straight to Katezari, in the Tadoba range, to see the Tiger (*Panthera tigris*). Our guide sighted fresh pugmarks and suggested we wait there to spot the tiger, which may have come to a nearby watering hole. About 10-12 feet away, in an opening of the bamboo thicket, was a male cub about a year old. He was one of the 4 cubs of a huge Katezari female - one male & 3 females. Through the dense foliage we could see the mother and the other two siblings. The third one was not to be seen.